

Dear Joe,

4/20/90

I've just begun to read, "Why Did The Heavens Not Darken?" by Arno Mayer, a Jew and historian and also a refugee from Hitler. (Pantheon, if you are interested.) He is from Luxemburg, from a family that had to have independent means from his account of their escape and the travels it required. His apparent belief, with which I'm not now inclined to believe, is that "the final solution" was decided on only after military reverses in the USSR. (The Wannsee conference was long before the beginning of the battle of Stalingrad. *Nabi Yar was, too.*

In reading what I've just finished and copied for you I was reminded of something you once said about your boyhood in the Ukraine after the revolution.

Mayer begins with a recounting of decimations of Jews in Europe and other acts against them from the First Crusade on. So, this is part of what is, in effect, his introduction to the main body of the book, Part 1. Part 2 begins with the founding of the Nazi regime.

You had said that the pogroms you experienced after the revolution were official, the policy of the revolutionary government. This was not in accord with my recollection of what I'd read years earlier but as I recall, I questioned it, without disputing it. After all, you were there and I wasn't. Lucky for me!

When I came to the bottom half of the first of the pages I've copied I was reminded of this. Instead of copying only that page, I copied the rest of this chapter on the chance it might be of interest to you.

I don't recall whether you were able to get out before Stalin came in or not, but I do recall telling you that Stalin's sins were great enough for the Reaganites and their ilk not inventing more to blame on him.

The thrust of this portion, as it relates to the conditions of Jews in those earlier days of the revolution, is consistent with one of the few things I remember of what I'd overheard my parents talking about then, when I was quite young. I think I told you but if I didn't, they'd been sending money to a relative who at the time of their conversation they'd just heard from. She told them that she no longer needed any help, that she had enough for herself, and that her children had been to college (my assumption) and had good jobs as teachers.

So, as I think I suggested when we discussed this, you were probably too young to make any distinction, but it was more likely the persecutions of the Petlurists that you recalled. Those of the Red Army were few and contrary to government policy.

What does surprise me about these pages is what they reflect not of the opportunities that the government made available to Jews but the surprising percentage of Jews who were able to take advantage of those opportunities, those who had the perception and the drive. They were, from what I understand, denied the educational opportunities available to non-Jews. They began from a condition of greater denial. Yet they were able to make more for themselves, to have better lives, to qualify for better employment.

I suppose this can be interpreted as validating a belief I've always held, that those who survived the centuries of persecution were better prepared to cope and to survive. And by this I mean those whose ancestors going way back had begun the survival process and somehow had passed the necessary somethings along through all those centuries.

Although I begin with the disagreement indicated above, I'm impressed by Mayer's scholarship and his writing. His advanced education was in foreign affairs from the little he says about himself.

I'm sorry our simple copier is not intended to copy from books so these are not the best possible copies of those pages.

Our best,
David

increasingly susceptible to fascism. Accordingly, the Jews of Europe's most unstable and perilous geopolitical region were scourged by a blend of traditional Judeophobia and new political anti-Semitism before becoming the prime victims of Nazi Germany's murderous fury.

In the second zone of eastern Europe, conditions were radically different. The Russian Revolution brought with it the instant emancipation of what until 1917 had been Europe's largest and most oppressed Jewish population. With the loss of the Baltic, Polish, and Bessarabian provinces, Russia's Jewish population was reduced from over 5.2 million to 2.7 million, which still left the Soviet Union with the Continent's second-largest Jewish community, immediately after Poland. Following the removal of all legal disabilities, the integration of the Jews of Russia proceeded in conjunction with the general transformation of political and civil society, with the result that within a quarter century the level of assimilation and acculturation approached that of the Jews of central and western Europe. Of course, because of the Bolsheviks' frontal assault on all organized religion, this breakneck integration entailed a more rapid crumbling of the religious foundations of Jewish culture in Soviet Russia than in any other country.

Russia's provisional government, under Alexander Kerensky, took the first essential step toward Jewish emancipation by proclaiming the liberation of all minorities. A decree dated April 2, 1917, repealed "all restrictions imposed upon the rights of Russian citizens by legislative acts . . . based upon their adherence to a particular religious faith, religious sect, or nationality." After their seizure of power the Bolsheviks continued in this same vein. On November 15, 1917, at Lenin's urging, the Council of People's Commissars reaffirmed and specified the abolition of all inequalities based on religion and nationality. By July of the following year, with the Whites playing on age-old animosities against the Jews to rally popular support for the counter-revolution, Lenin signed a decree calling on "all the Soviets to adopt firm measures in order to uproot the anti-Semitic movement" and to outlaw "pogromists and those who incite pogroms by their agitation." To be sure, it would take more than an official ukase backed with penalties to eradicate deeply ingrained anti-Jewish prejudices, notably in the towns and villages of the Ukraine and Belorussia. Still, the Bolshevik regime did proscribe public anti-Semitic speech and agitation, and the improved status of Jews was one of the most striking accomplishments of the Russian Revolution.

Early in the Civil War several Red Army units apparently victimized Jews in the Ukraine. But such incidents seem to have been the

exception, and ceased altogether once the High Command imposed its authority as part of the consolidation of power in Soviet-controlled territories. In any case, the top political and military leaders of the fragile Bolshevik regime firmly condemned rather than condoned or encouraged anti-Jewish outbursts, whether military or civilian.

By contrast, the chiefs of the Ukrainian nationalists and the Whites either inflamed the anti-Jewish feelings of their troops and followers, or else failed to curb them. Certainly, Simon Petlura, the Ukrainian herman, did little to check the pogroms and anti-Jewish army riots that swept the provinces under his control in 1918-20. Admittedly, General Anton Denikin, the commander in chief of the volunteer armies in the south, sought to bridle his *ernags*. He did so primarily to placate Woodrow Wilson and Lloyd George, who were said to make additional Allied aid conditional on self-restraint in the anti-Bolshevik camp. But just as Denikin claimed to be unable to keep large landowners from seizing back their lands from peasants, so he appeared powerless to stop his officers and men from perpetrating atrocities against Jews. In Siberia, meanwhile, Admiral Alexander Kolchak, the nominal supreme ruler of Russia, remained an undisguised ideological warrior who publicly endorsed the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. On the whole, the Whites presented their struggle to restore the old regime and the late empire as a selfless crusade against Jewish, godless, and barbaric communism. Members of the old ruling and governing classes, including high Russian Orthodox clerics, pressed this cause at the headquarters and in the outlying precincts of the counterrevolution.

In the Russian Civil War—as in all civil wars—fanaticism and ruthlessness were characteristic of both sides. But the Ukrainian anti-Bolsheviks and the Whites easily surpassed the Reds in brutalizing and slaughtering innocent civilians, and these included a disproportionately large number of Jews. In 1918-19 over 1,200 Jews were fatally assaulted in the Ukraine alone, and these transgressions continued in 1920, though at a reduced pace. The Jews were also victimized by the Polish armies, notably in Belorussia, during the Polish advance into Russia that was part of the Allied intervention in support of the Whites. According to the best and most conservative estimates, between 30,000 and 50,000 Jews, nearly all males, were slain in these pogroms and army riots. Easily that many again eventually died of injuries. All this time countless others suffered extreme material and psychological damage. Most of this destruction was centered in the former Pale of Settlement, which was destined to become the principal locale for the "Final Solution" some twenty years later.

Jews played an active role in the composite reformist and revolutionary movement that broke to the surface once military overexertion and defeat cracked the foundations of the tsarist regime. In particular, they figured prominently among the leaders not only of the Bolshevik Party but also of the Menshevik and Social Revolutionary parties. The champions of the old order seized upon this fact to denounce the revolution as a Jewish-inspired and directed plot.

Although Jews played a significant role in the leadership of the opposition parties, they provided little of the social base for revolt. Many of the prominent Jewish radicals had turned their back on the culture and language of their native milieu, which probably made it more difficult for them to rally "their" people. Besides, the economic and social program of the left-wing parties was not designed to appeal to the bulk of Russian Jewry, which was neither proletarian nor peasant, but lower-middle-class. Certainly, before 1917-18, few Jews joined or supported the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries, let alone the Bolsheviks.

To the extent that Jewish artisans and workers engaged in radical political and syndical action, they did so primarily through the Bund. Closely tied to the Menshevik Party, the Bund stood for a social democratic society with equal rights and cultural autonomy for Jews. In late 1917 the Bund counted well over 30,000 members, making it perhaps Russia's largest left-wing political organization. Like the leaders of the other radical opposition parties, most leaders of the Bund opposed the Bolshevik seizure of power not only because they feared a counterrevolutionary backlash but also because they disagreed with Lenin's domestic program and policies.

Actually, instead of supporting the left, most politically conscious Russian Jews were drawn to Zionist and Orthodox Jewish organizations, which were socially and culturally conservative. Many also backed the Cadets, or Constitutional Democrats, who constituted the core of the loyal democratic opposition to the autocracy.

It was not until after the start of the Civil War and the Allied intervention on the side of the Whites that Jews of all classes and persuasions began to rally around the beleaguered Bolshevik regime. They did so for fear that the defeat and overthrow of the Soviets would bring on the restoration of an *ancien régime* certain to revoke the edict of Jewish emancipation and to condone, if not sponsor, the pogroms. Indeed, it took the anti-Jewish massacres and excesses of the White Guards, the Ukrainians, and the Poles to swing the Jews behind Lenin and Trotsky. This was particularly the case in the Ukraine and Belorussia, where young ~~Bundists rushed to enlist in the Red Army~~ ^{gathering the hand of their leaders.}

As previously noted, the contraction of Russia's western borders reduced Russia's Jewish population from 5.2 million to 2.7 million. But except for this numerical decrease and the economic hardships of the war and revolution, the condition of the Jews of Russia remained unchanged until after the Civil War and Allied intervention, when it improved radically and quickly.

In 1914, while the Jews accounted for slightly over 4 percent of Russia's total population of 130 million, 90 percent of them were concentrated in the fifteen European provinces of the Pale of Settlement stretching from the Black Sea to the Baltic coast. While they constituted about 11 percent of the total population of this Pale, which was heavily rural, they made up close to 40 percent of its urban population. At most, 3 percent of the Jewish labor force worked in agriculture, compared to over 30 percent in petty commerce. Jews were above all ensconced in traditional manufacture. Of the close to 660,000 Jewish laboring men in the Pale, only about 10 percent were factory workers, while most of the remaining 90 percent were artisans in small and technologically outdated workshops. Nearly all firms were owner-operated with the help of one or two apprentices.

The bulk of Russian Jewry was lower-middle-class, concentrated in petty manufacture and trade primarily for and within the Jewish community, much of it impoverished. Although the great emigration of the prewar decades alleviated the stress of daily life, about 30 percent of Russian Jews received relief from Jewish welfare agencies. Over 95 percent spoke Yiddish and lived in cloistered communities whose organic culture was half religious and half secular.

Capitalist modernization began to erode the economic viability and cultural self-containment of these communities well before the Great War. More and more young Jews learned Russian, acquired new skills, and either looked or stepped beyond the Pale as they sought to fashion less impoverished and sectarian lives for themselves. Still, it was not until the Bolshevik regime quickened the pace of state-controlled modernization that the life of Russian Jewry began to be strikingly transformed. As of 1921 the push and pull of rapid economic growth and diversification hastened the "normalization" of the Jewish communities in Belorussia and the Ukraine to the east of the new Poland. With the end of ethnic discrimination Jews took jobs in factories, joined agricultural communes, and began to work in the rapidly expanding state apparatus as technicians, engineers, administrators, doctors, and academics. Though at the price of political compliance, many Jews of petty bourgeois and working-class origin, along with scores of non-Jewish Russians of similar background, applied for positions formerly closed to them, eager to improve their

economic situation as well as to enhance their geographic and social mobility.

From 1926 to 1939 the Jewish population rose from 2.7 million to slightly over 3 million, less by virtue of a high birth rate than a rapidly falling infant-mortality rate. During the same fifteen years, except for a momentary upturn, the number of Jews on the land remained stable. Despite the efforts of the Commission for the Rural Settlement of Jewish Toilers, less than 6 percent of all Jews made their living from agriculture. But in most other respects the Jewish occupational structure was radically changed. The number of petty shopkeepers and peddlers rapidly declined. Although 15 to 20 percent of all working Jews were still self-employed artisans, by the late 1930s many of them belonged to cooperatives. About 70 percent of all gainfully employed Jews now earned wages and salaries, half of them as skilled workers, technicians, and managers in the fast-growing industrial sector. Overall, the percentage of employed Jews who were handworkers remained roughly unchanged since before 1914 at 20 percent. By comparison, the proportion of Jews working in white-collar positions rose from 7 to over 37 percent, and that of Jews in the professions from 3 to nearly 13 percent.

This prodigious transformation of the Jewish work force was closely related to the restaffing and expansion of the state apparatus, as well as to the development of party agencies. Having proven their reliability and usefulness during the Civil War, and with the Soviets determined to promote their "normalization," Jews were hired to fill many of the government vacancies created when incumbent officials resigned, went into exile, or were purged. In addition to filling this vacuum, Jews studied to qualify for the countless openings in the burgeoning state and party apparatus. As of the late twenties, close to 8 percent of all government employees were Jewish. A disproportionate number of Jews came to hold posts in the secret police and to serve as political commissars in the armed services. They not only occupied lowly official jobs but were also appointed to high-level and conspicuous positions which called for unimpeachable political loyalty, if not party membership.

This profound vocational mutation fostered both geographic and social mobility. By 1939 over 1 million Jews, or easily one-third of the total, lived outside the former Pale. The overwhelming majority of Soviet Jews became city rather than shtetl dwellers. A full 40 percent were concentrated in six major cities, where they lived not in separate Jewish districts but in integrated neighborhoods.

The Jews who moved ahead professionally and moved out of the former Pale were also in the vanguard of assimilation and accultura-

tion. Between 1926 and 1939 the proportion of Russian Jews declaring Yiddish to be their first language was reported to have fallen from 72 to 41 percent. At the same time, mixed unions soared to over 15 percent of all Jewish marriages in the big cities within the former Pale, and to 25 percent outside. Russification and Sovietization were particularly pronounced among Jews going to universities, who made up between 13 and 15 percent of the student body. About 45 percent of all medical students in the Ukraine and Belorussia were Jewish, as were 11 percent in the Russian Republic. Between the wars Jewish enrollments kept rising in both absolute and relative numbers not only at universities but also in higher technical and vocational schools.

The integration of Russian Jews was driven forward by the push of chronic poverty intensified by war, revolution, and civil war, and by the pull of the unexpected opportunities opened up by the emancipation of 1917. In turn, the Soviet government channeled the process along lines compatible with its inchoate revolutionary project. In early 1918 it set up the Yevsektzia to create and direct special sections for Jewish affairs inside major state and party organs. Staffed by Jews of Bolshevik persuasion, these sections had a triple assignment: to undermine, if not destroy, all traditional loyalties, institutions, and conventions; to foster support, not to say zeal, for the Bolshevik regime and purpose; and to promote the fundamental reshaping of Russian Jewry.

Yevsektzia's Jewish activists were divided between those favoring the wholesale assimilation of Jews into Soviet Russian life and those advocating the development of a separate Jewish culture without religious moorings. At the outset, however, both factions were resolved to press the new regime's general drive against all centers and institutions of non- and anti-Bolshevik power within the Jewish world. In the noneconomic sphere the first and easiest task was to help close down Jewish political parties and organizations. This instant operation was followed by the much more difficult and long-term war of attrition against organized religion and religiously infused cultural activities, especially in the provinces. Yevsektzia's sections forced the closing of synagogues, heders, yeshivas, and voluntary associations. This drive to choke off religious life was combined with the promotion of a profane Yiddish subculture divested of its collective mneme and the Hebrew language.

During the 1920s this secularizing enterprise made some headway, as measured by the growing number of Yiddish schools, publications, and performing ensembles. But by the late twenties, the push to create a genuinely autonomous and thoroughly secularized Yiddish

culture was exhausted. Backed by the government, the assimilationists had gained the upper hand over the autonomists in the Yevsektsia sections, with the result that the new Yiddish establishments increasingly became agents for the regime's deppluralizing educational and cultural programs. This shift was justified and facilitated by the fact that rather than enroll their children in Yiddish schools, more and more Jewish parents chose to send them to regular schools with a view to improving their life chances. The religious Jews alone stood apart, rejecting both the assimilationist and the autonomist nostrums.

At the end of the decade the Soviets began to intensify their strangulation of Jewish nonconformity along with that of all other religions and national minorities. They now used administrative, fiscal, and police measures to curtail religious training, worship in synagogues, and Hebrew instruction. There is no denying the mounting official pressure for compliance and conformity. Even so, except for the use of coercion, the religious and cultural de-Judaization of Soviet Jewry, like its occupational and social transformation, was part of the press for Jewish "normalization" which was common to all of Europe.

Certainly, whatever the Bolshevik proscriptions and compulsions, they were animated by militant materialism rather than anti-Semitism. No steps were taken to reduce the very considerable presence of Jews in state and party. As previously noted, Jews held a disproportionate number of government posts at all levels. Starting in 1917, they played an equally considerable role in the Bolshevik Party. In August of that year six out of the twenty-one members of the Central Committee were Jewish: Kamenev, Sokolnikov, Trotsky, Uritsky, Zinoviev, and Sverdlov. Until 1926 Zinoviev was head of the Comintern and Trotsky remained one of the regime's strongmen, bidding for first place. Between the early twenties and the late thirties Jews accounted for between 4 and 5 percent of the party membership, and they were no less well represented in the party apparatus and in key organs of state.

During the years 1926 through 1929 Trotsky was, of course, driven first from the Central Committee, then from the Politburo, and finally from the country as well. But anti-Semitism was at best incidental to his fall, which was occasioned by the struggle for supremacy within the party. Kamenev and Zinoviev, who sided with Trotsky against Stalin, deserted the former in good time and managed to persevere until 1936, when they were liquidated in the political purge. Hundreds of Jewish officers and political commissars of the Red Army perished in the great military purge of 1937-38, which decimated the Soviet officer corps and consumed at least 30,000 lives. Among the Jewish victims were the chief of the army's political director-

ate, the commander of the military district of Leningrad, and the chief of civil defense. But while anti-Jewish prejudice may well have entered into the selection of Jews to be killed in the bloody purges and to be removed from important posts in state and party, Stalin's terror was not directed specifically, principally, or disproportionately against Jews. It was a measure of the sweeping forced-draft change in the condition of Soviet Jewry that by the mid-thirties about 4 percent of the officer corps and 8 percent of the political commissars were of Jewish ancestry. The purges neither significantly changed the Jewish presence in the Red Army nor stopped the promotion of Jews to high-ranking positions. Similarly, Stalin's dismissal, in May 1939, of Maxim Litvinov, the Jewish commissar of foreign affairs, was a maneuver in world politics and did not prestage an anti-Jewish purge of the Foreign Office and the diplomatic service. Indeed, the Jews retained their historically unprecedented place in Russia's bureaucracy and armed services, and also their unexceptional position in the Bolshevik Party. This was in stark contrast with the acute deterioration of the condition of Jews in eastern, east-central, and central Europe.